

Focal Species Plan Executive Summary

Northeast Region Division of Migratory Birds

The American Oystercatcher is a large shorebird that inhabits coastal islands and salt marshes throughout the year, and occurs in the largest concentrations along the southeastern United States coast. It is listed as a Species of High Concern in the U.S. Shorebird Conservation Plan. Oystercatchers nest on barrier beaches, sandbars, spoil islands, shell islands, and marsh islands from Nova Scotia to eastern Mexico. In winter, flocks occur from central New Jersey southward. Smaller populations occur in the Caribbean, and coastally south to Argentina and Chile.

The American Oystercatcher Focal Species Plan summarizes current knowledge of their life history, distribution, and population trend, describes current threats, lists research and management needs, and outlines recommended conservation actions.



The major threats to the health of the species are:

- Loss of habitat from coastal development;
- Disturbance, from human recreational activities, at all stages of the birds' annual cycle;
- Elevated predation from predators associated with human activities;
- Contamination of their primary food sources by non-point pollution and/or oil spills; and
- Effects of global climate change, especially predicted raising of sea-level.

Conservation activities recommended to address these threats include:

- Identification and protection of existing habitat;
- Creation of new habitat through carefully designed use of dredge-spoil materials;
- Management of existing protected areas to reduce predation and disturbance;
- Control of predator populations, especially in the nesting season; and
- Monitoring of population status and trend to measure conservation effectiveness.

Because American Oystercatchers share habitat with other coastal specialist birds, conservation efforts for Oystercatchers will benefit these other species, and vice-versa.

Considerable research is needed to refine knowledge of the population dynamics and limiting factors that affect American Oystercatchers, and specific recommendations are provided in the focal species plan. Suggestions are also made for methods to evaluate the effect of conservation actions.

Proposed Conservation Activities for American Oystercatcher*

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10	10 Year Total
Conservation Actions for Breeding Habitat											
A. Identify and protect new habitat	45,000	45,000	45,000	5,000	5,000	5,000	5,000	5,000	5,000	5,000	170,000
B. Identify and protect existing habitat	40,000	40,000	40,000								120,000
C. Manage protected areas to reduce predation on nests and chicks	263,333	263,333	263,333	145,000	145,000	145,000	145,000	145,000	145,000	145,000	1,804,999
D. Manage protected areas to reduce human disturbance	92,000	92,000	92,000	52,000	52,000	52,000	52,000	52,000	52,000	52,000	640,000
E. Create and maintain new habitat (dredge spoil)	10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000	100,000
F. Outreach	63,500	53,500	10,000	5,000	5,000	5,000	5,000	5,000	5,000	5,000	162,000
Conservation Actions for Non-breeding Habitat											
A. Identify and protect key areas	626,000	51,000	51,000	1,000	1,000						730,000
B. Identify and protect shell rakes/monitor disturbance	21,000	21,000	21,000	21,000	21,000	20,000	20,000				145,000
C. Manage existing protected areas to reduce human disturbance	2,500	2,500	2,500	2,500	2,500	2,500	2,500	2,500	2,500	2,500	25,000
D. Outreach	10,000										10,000
Address Critical Knowledge Gaps											
A. Reduce critical knowledge gaps regarding demographics and limiting factors	391,666	386,666	266,666	186,000	146,000	70,000	70,000	70,000	70,000	70,000	1,726,998
B. Determine and monitor population size and trend	220,000	188,000	171,000	171,000	171,000	170,000	170,000	170,000	170,000	170,000	1,771,000
C. Combine genetics/stable isotope study to determine connectivity and movements between populations	15,000	15,000	15,000	15,000							60,000
D. Foraging studies	50,000	50,000	50,000	10,000	10,000	10,000					180,000
E. Breeding status and biology of AMOY on Chesapeake Bay	40,000	40,000									80,000
F. Egg/chick rearing program	10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000	100,000
G. Initiate long-term breeding banding program	30,000	30,000	30,000	30,000	30,000	30,000	30,000	30,000	30,000	30,000	300,000
H. Disturbance study	50,000	50,000	50,000	50,000	50,000						250,000
I. Nest success in alternate habitat study	35,000	35,000	35,000	35,000	35,000						175,000
Totals	2,014,999	1,382,999	1,162,499	748,500	693,500	529,500	519,500	499,500	499,500	499,500	8,549,997

*See American Oystercatcher Focal Species Plan for specific projects, partners and budgets.